Amendments to the Specification:

Please replace paragraph [0122] with the following amended paragraph:

[0122] A non-limiting example of how peptide inhibitors of the NIK-TRAF2 interaction would be designed and screened is based on previous studies on peptide inhibitors of ICE or ICE-like proteases, the substrate specificity of ICE and strategies for epitope analysis using peptide synthesis. The minimum requirement for efficient cleavage of a peptide by ICE was found to involve four amino acids to the left of the cleavage site with a strong preference for aspartic acid in the P_1 position and with methylamine being sufficient to the right of the P_1 position (Sleath et al., 1990; Howard et al., 1991; Thornberry et al., 1992). Furthermore, the fluorogenic substrate peptide (a tetrapeptide), acetyl-Asp-Glu-Val-Asp-a-(4-methyl-coumaryl-7-amide) (SEQ ID NO:21) abbreviated Ac-DEVD-AMC, corresponds to a sequence in poly (ADP-ribose) polymerase (PARP) found to be cleaved in cells shortly after FAS-R stimulation, as well as other apoptotic processes (Kaufmann, 1989; Kaufmann et al., 1993; Lazebnik et al., 1994), and is cleaved effectively by CPP32 (a member of the CED3/ICE protease family) and MACH proteases.

Please replace paragraph [0125] with the following amended paragraph:

[0125] Since it may be advantageous to design peptide inhibitors that selectively inhibit TRAF2-NIK (or TRAF-TRAF binding protein) interactions without interfering with physiological cell death processes in which other members of the intracellular signaling pathway are involved, e.g., MACH proteases of the cell death pathway, which are members of the CED3/ICE family of proteases, the pool of peptides binding to TRAF2 (or TRAF) or NIK (or TRAF-binding proteins) in an assay such as the one described above can be further synthesized as a fluorogenic substrate peptide to test for selective binding to such other proteins to select only those specific for TRAF2/NIK (or TRAF/TRAF-binding protein). Peptides which are determined to be specific for, for example, TRAF2/NIK, can then be modified to enhance cell permeability and inhibit the activity of TRAF2 and/or NIK either reversibly or irreversibly. Thornberry et al. (1994) reported that a tetrapeptide (acyloxy) methyl ketone Ac-Tyr-Val-Ala-Asp-CH_2OC (O)-[2,6-$(CF_3)_2$] Ph (SEQ ID NO:22) was a potent inactivator of ICE. Similarly, Milligan et al. (1995) reported that tetrapeptide inhibitors having a chloromethylketone (irreversibly) or aldehyde (reversibly) groups inhibited ICE. In addition, a benzyloxycarboxyl-Asp-CH_2OC (O) -2,6-dichlorobenzene (DCB) was shown to inhibit ICE (Mashima et al., 1995). Accordingly, in an analogous way,

tetrapeptides that selectively bind to, for example, TRAF2 or NIK, can be modified with, for example, an aldehyde group, chloromethylketone, (acyloxy) methyl ketone or a $CH_2OC(O)$-DCB group to create a peptide inhibitor of TRAF2/NIK activity. Further, to improve permeability, peptides can be, for example, chemically modified or derivatized to enhance their permeability across the cell membrane and facilitate the transport of such peptides through the membrane and into the cytoplasm. Muranishi et al. (1991) reported derivatizing thyrotropin-releasing hormone with lauric acid to form a lipophilic lauroyl derivative with good penetration characteristics across cell membranes. Zacharia et al. (1991) also reported the oxidation of methionine to sulfoxide and the replacement of the peptide bond with its ketomethylene isoester ($COCH_2$) to facilitate transport of peptides through the cell membrane. These are just some of the known modifications and derivatives that are well within the skill of those in the art.